

Mayor's Corner June 2025

Land-use Regulations: What We Are Hearing

By Elspeth McLean-Wile

As many of you know, the District of Lunenburg is developing a district-wide planning strategy. I've attended five public meetings, one virtual meeting, and several discussion sessions with planners and residents. I've also had phone calls and casual conversations about planning at community events.

What am I learning? The plan must reflect our growth while capturing the deeply rooted traditions and culture of the area.

Many residents don't fully understand what a municipal plan includes or why it's needed. A municipal planning strategy sets long-term goals for land use, development, and environmental protection. It guides zoning, permitting, and regulations to ensure growth reflects community values and meets provincial requirements.

These policies are complex, covering topics like agricultural land, drinking water, housing, infrastructure, and flood risks.

In 2024, Council passed Coastal Protection By-laws regulating setbacks from the coast, vegetative buffers, and other requirements. These will form part of the plan.

Many are concerned about how zoning will affect their properties. Existing structures and uses will be grandfathered, but new development must follow the new rules. Over time, zoning may evolve with community needs. Communities with existing Secondary Planning Strategies—Hebville, Blockhouse, Hemford Forest, Riverport, Prince's Inlet—will see little change.

We've heard concerns about restrictions on small-scale agriculture and home-based businesses. These are vital to our local economy and food self-sufficiency. We do not want regulations that discourage entrepreneurship or raising livestock.

The planning process is complex and requires Council to consider the provincial "statements of interest" set out by the provincial government. Our municipal planning strategy must reflect action taken around these areas of provincial interest.

Council recently held a policy discussion around protection of watershed areas, one of the areas required by the provincial government to be included in our plan. We have three watershed areas in the District that provide water to the Town of Bridgewater (Hebb Lake, Milipsigate and Minamkeak Lakes), Mahone Bay (Oakland Lake), and Lunenburg (Dares Lake) Osprey Village and the developments at Exit 12.

These watershed areas are already protected by the Nova Scotia Environment Act through legislation adopted in the mid-1960s and early 1970s. Now, because of more advanced technologies the watershed areas that supply the water sources are determined to be much larger.

The Department of Environment regulates the activities in watershed areas but not the buildings or structures; that is where the requirement for land use by-laws becomes relevant.

The Municipality will need to consider minimum planning requirements to protect the quality of drinking water supplies. Council will need to consider how we establish 'protection' through permitting or prohibiting certain uses of the land, establishing lot size and density within the watershed, introducing setbacks and buffer distances on watercourses, etc.

You can watch Council's recent discussion on watershed protection here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VF2sjdkj-Ow>. There will be further discussions on agricultural land and home-based businesses at meetings in June and July. All are open to the public.

The attendance at the community meetings has been excellent. People come because they want to understand and learn, some are angry and fearful of what we are doing, and many want to contribute constructive ideas and share their concerns. Regardless of the motivation for attending the meetings, your Council appreciates the level of engagement we are getting on this work.

We are listening carefully and will draw on the input we get from residents to create a revised draft that we will take back to the community this fall.

Keep up with the work at engage.modl.ca. Attend a meeting, ask questions, and do not hesitate to reach out.

